

A Review of the Chinese Higher Education Evaluation Center

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The rapid economic development in China has also brought the advancement in higher education. In 2004, the student enrollment has reached more than 20 million in 1,731 different types of institutions of higher learning. Established in August 2004, the Higher Education Evaluation Center is an administrative body under the auspices of the Chinese Ministry of Education. Its main responsibilities include organizing and conducting evaluation of baccalaureate and associate degree programs offered at different universities and colleges in China, conduct research on regulations and policies on higher education reform and provide recommendations for the decision-makers, and develop international cooperation and exchanges with other higher education evaluation/accreditation agencies from other countries as well as from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

Although still in its fledgling stage judged by the professional standard, the initiative of contemporary evaluation of higher education started more than twenty years ago when the then State Education Commission of China issued Notice on Pilot Evaluation of Higher Education of Engineering in 1985. In 1990,

the Commission issued Draft Regulation of Higher Education Institution Evaluation. This was the first regulation on higher education evaluation in China. Since early 1994, the Commission started organizing evaluation of undergraduate teaching and learning of second tier universities and colleges. Established after 1976 or the end of the Cultural Revolution, these institutions of higher learning had relatively short history. The evaluation aimed at strengthening infrastructure construction, improving management, teaching and learning. The universities and colleges that underwent evaluation were selected by the Commission. About 190 institutions completed the evaluation by the end of 2002.

From 1996 through 2001, another round of so-called undergraduate evaluation of excellence was conducted to universities and colleges which had relatively long history and better quality. Sixteen institutions applied to such evaluation in the hope of being ranked as excellent institutions of higher learning. From 1998 through 2001, the Ministry of Education randomly selected twenty-six universities and colleges and, evaluated their undergraduate education programs. In 2002, the Ministry of Education issued Evaluation of University

Baccalaureate Program. One hundred and sixteen universities and colleges completed evaluation under this program.

In 2003, in its Action Plan of Education Innovation 2003-2007, the Ministry of Education spelled out that all higher institutions of learning would be evaluated every five years. In the same year, the Ministry of Education also drafted an evaluation plan for vocational colleges and started the pilot evaluation of twenty-six vocational colleges. In 2004, it was decided that each provincial education department would implement the evaluation of vocational colleges; the Ministry of Education would periodically check on the evaluation results. One hundred and seven vocational colleges completed evaluation by the end of 2004.

The establishment of the Higher Education Evaluation Center in the Ministry of Education indicates that the higher education evaluation in China is developing to become more systematic and professional. To further improve education quality, a quality assurance system and monitoring mechanism need to be established. To achieve that end, evaluations of institutions of higher learning will continue every five years. Basic institutional information regarding infrastructure, teaching and learning will be collected and stored in a database; such information will be made available to the general public to increase public awareness of the effectiveness of higher education institutions. The Ministry of Education will also conduct evaluation with the assistance from relevant professional organizations, combine both external and internal evaluation to encourage institutions to establish an internal quality assurance mechanism.